
STOR

ARAB–BYZANTINE RELATIONS UNDER THE UMAYYAD CALIPHATE

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THE wars between Islam and Byzantium occupy so prominent, indeed almost exclusive, a place in our history books and in the chronicles on which they draw, that the student of mediaeval history may be excused for taking the rubric "Arab-Byzantine Relations" as a record of little more than continual warfare. The record is not untrue, for in fact frontier warfare lasted almost unbrokenly for a period of centuries. It is not, however, the whole truth. The proof of this statement is not easy, for direct references to relations of any other kind in the mediaeval sources, if we exclude those that arise out of warfare, such as truces and embassies, can almost be counted on the fingers. Fortunately, however, there are, to supplement these scanty materials, a few other facts or details that can be exploited.

In dealing with any subject of this kind there are two general considerations to be borne in mind. Mediaeval chronicles, whatever their merits (and they are many), suffer from one almost universal defect. They present a narrowly-focussed view of events. Those, the majority, written around the activities of some ruling institution, Caliphs, Emperors, or Sultans, concentrate on the political affairs undertaken by or relevant to the history of that particular institution, and rarely note things that happened or activities that were going on elsewhere. Their standard of reference is what may be called the "official level," the level of matters that interested official circles or affected their working, even if they might be the most trivial news items from the capital. The affairs of the provinces are seldom mentioned except insofar as they were reflected in events at the capital, such as the calling to account of some too-enterprising provincial taxmaster.

To compensate for this in part there survive a few local chronicles, histories of provinces or cities, such as Egypt or Bokhara, which take the political history of the Caliphate or Empire for granted and concentrate on their own local affairs. But these are even more narrowly focussed, and in a certain degree even more concentrated at the official or scholastic level. It is a local history of Egypt, for example, that furnishes almost all our early information about the Andalusian adventurers who captured Crete in 827. But this information is incidental only to the trouble which they gave to the governors of Egypt during their occupation of Alexandria, and the local chronicler is interested neither in how they came to be in Alexandria nor, after their departure to Crete, in what happened to them there. Any

attempt, then, to present an overall picture must proceed by fitting together odd bits and pieces, and filling in the gaps by reasonable deduction.

The second general consideration links up with this. In a society as loosely articulated as were all mediaeval societies, and not least in the East, it is completely unrealistic to assume that the interests and activities of all sections of any one society were the same as those of the official class, or were even controlled in more than a general fashion by the governing institution. The complex of society was made up of a mosaic of small communities that lived their own lives, carried on their own affairs and fended for themselves, often in isolation from the other communities, and almost always without much notice being taken of what they were doing or whether it was in agreement with official policy.

The major problem therefore remains — to find the data which may serve as clues to Byzantine-Arab relations, other than warfare, during one century of Islamic history, the century of the Umayyad Caliphate of Damascus, 661–750.

The pre-Islamic relations of the Arabs with the Byzantine Empire are sufficiently well-known, if not yet explored in full detail.[1] Under Islam, regular or official relations, if they may be so termed, begin with the establishment of the Umayyad Caliphate. Before then, the Greeks, the *Rūm*, are simply the enemy whom the Arab generals drove out of Syria and Egypt, finally began to harry at sea, in Cyprus and Rhodes, and even succeeded in defeating in the first naval battle of an Arab fleet. With the establishment of the Umayyads, the situation begins to alter subtly. To be sure, the Greeks are still the enemy, and Arab armies and fleets push their way through to the gates of Constantinople once, twice, and yet a third time; and in between these massive culminating enterprises, and after the failure of the last, maintain a program of annual incursions in winter and spring. All this is the formal and indispensable public duty of the Caliphs, the Commanders of the Faithful who are bound by the conditions of their office to pursue the Holy War against the Unbelievers, and who must justify their claim to be the Successors of the Prophet in the eyes of their Muslim subjects by visibly striving for the extension of Islam. At the same time, it serves to maintain the discipline and fighting qualities of their Syrian troops, for on this de-

[1] Recent studies include A. A. Vasiliev, "Notes on some Episodes concerning the Relations between the Arabs and the Byzantine Empire from the fourth to the sixth Century," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 9–10 (Cambridge, Mass., 1955–56), 306–316; and I. Kawar, "The Arabs in the Peace Treaty of A.D. 561" in *Arabica*, III, fasc. 2 (Leiden, 1956), 181–213. See also M. Canard, "Quelques 'à-côté' de l'histoire des relations entre Byzance et les Arabes" in *Studi Orientalistici in onore di G. Levi della Vida*, I (Rome, 1956), 98–119, for later Arab-Byzantine relations.

pends their ability to control the open or suppressed insubordination of the Arab tribesmen in the other provinces.

The public policy of the Umayyads, then, remains the same as that of their predecessors. Byzantium is the enemy, and that is all there is to it. In reality, however, the Umayyad relations with Byzantium were by no means confined to simple national or religious hostility, but were governed by more ambivalent attitudes of both attraction and opposition.

Since the Syrian troops were of crucial importance for the maintenance of the Umayyads, the origins and distribution of the Syrian army are of some significance. It was grouped in five divisions, two in the south, two in the center, and one in the north. The southern divisions were composed mainly of Southern and Western Arabian tribes, some of whom were established there well before the Islamic conquest and in relations with the Byzantine governors, and some of whom had come in with the Islamic armies. The central divisions were formed almost solidly of old-established tribes, who had in pre-Islamic days been enrolled as auxiliaries of the Greeks in the wars with Persia, and whose chiefs had held Byzantine titles and had long been familiar with Constantinople and its government. The northern division, on the other hand, was composed chiefly of North-Arabian tribes who had come in at the time of the conquests and had known no relations with Byzantium except in warfare.

It was the central divisions and tribesmen, those of Damascus and Emesa, with which the Umayyad Caliphs were most closely associated, both by geography and by marriage relations, and who were their most devoted supporters. There can be little doubt that this connection played some part in familiarizing the Caliphs with the former Byzantine institutions, but it must obviously not be exaggerated. Nor must even the influence of the ex-Byzantine officials who continued largely to staff the administrative services in Syria be overstressed. Nevertheless, the increasing tendency of the Umayyads to adopt Byzantine usages and to emulate the Greek Emperors is a patent fact. The remarkable care shown by the Caliphs for the upkeep of roads, even to the extent of imitating the Roman milestones, was certainly not inspired by Arabian custom or tradition; and the further facts that the Latin *veredus* and *millia* were transposed into Arabic as *barīd* and *mīl* show where the idea came from. The earliest gold coinage of the Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik was Byzantine in design, even to the extent of bearing an effigy of the Caliph, until it was withdrawn and replaced by a more orthodox Muslim design in deference to the religious feeling of his subjects. In ceremonial also, although it continued on the whole to be governed by Arab and Islamic usage (again in deference to the traditions

of the subjects), there was a slow process of small adjustments to Byzantine practice; and, as is well-known, the ex-Byzantine provinces retained their Byzantine systems of revenue administration.

In addition to these adaptations or adoptions of the outward usages of Byzantium, recent research has revealed a more subtle way in which the Caliphs were imitating Byzantine usage, by the practice of defining legal norms by administrative rescript. Islamic Law was in its first century still fluid or inchoate in detail, and left open a wide field for regulation on specific points. Although few of the Umayyad rescripts have survived in their original form, the traces of them have been discovered both positively, in a number of rulings of the later law schools, and negatively, in the declared opposition of these schools to some of the Umayyad rulings and to the principle of definition of law by rescript in general.[2]

The most striking legacy of the imperial heritage, however, is furnished by the Umayyad policy of erecting imperial religious monuments. The Byzantine inspiration of this policy is beyond doubt, and is made more unmistakeable by the fact that this policy was *not* followed by the ʿAbbāsid Caliphs of Baghdād in their capital provinces, although they did enlarge the mosques of Mecca and Medīna. Certain Muslim historians, of much later date, and not generally sympathetic to the Umayyads (besides being based on ʿIraqi traditions, and therefore ignorant of the Byzantine example), surmise that the object of the Umayyad Caliphs was to replace Mecca and Medīna as religious shrines by Jerusalem and Damascus. This is a fantastic idea, even though it is still echoed by western historians, and obviously belied by the fact that the mosque of Medīna was one of the three imperial monuments built or rebuilt by the Umayyads.[3] An echo — a belated, but nevertheless authentic echo — of the native Syrian tradition has survived in the work of the tenth-century geographer al-Maqdisī, a native of Jerusalem. He cites a local tradition that the Umayyad Caliphs ʿAbd al-Malik and al-Walīd were moved to build the Dome of the Rock and the Great Mosque at Damascus by fear lest the Muslims be tempted away from their faith by the magnificence of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and other Christian edifices in Syria.[4] The tradition may possibly reflect rather too narrowly the outlook of Jerusalem, but it very probably preserves a trace of the true motives of the Umayyads: not simply to rival the Christian edifices in Syria, but also (as the reconstruction of the Prophet's Mosque at

[2] See J. Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford, 1950).

[3] Al-Walīd is said to have embellished also the Sanctuary at Mecca with mosaics.

[4] *Bibl. Geographorum Arabicorum*, III, 159. See also E. Lambert, "Les Origines de la Mosquée et l'architecture religieuse des Omeiyades" in *Studia Islamica*, VI (Paris, 1956), esp. 16.

Medīna shows even more clearly) to emulate the imperial example. That this was a leading motive is made still more certain by a particular circumstance relating to the construction of at least two of the three mosques, to which most of this paper will be devoted.

The Dome of the Rock was built by 'Abd al-Malik about 690; the mosques of Damascus and Medīna (as well as the Aqṣā Mosque at Jerusalem) by his son al-Walīd I, between 705 and 712. The circumstance in question is the tradition current in later Muslim sources that the Caliph requested and obtained the aid of the Greek Emperor for the decoration of the Prophet's Mosque at Medīna and the Great Mosque at Damascus. The discussion of this tradition involves entering into somewhat complicated detail, since a fresh study of the sources has led the present writer to disagree with some of the arguments put forward by the most recent and authoritative writers on these three monuments, Professor K. A. C. Creswell, Mlle. Marguerite van Berchem, and the late French historian, Jean Sauvaget.

The tradition on which all discussion has hitherto centered is one contained in the great chronicle of al-Ṭabarī (d. A.D. 923):

> "Muḥammad says: Mūsā b. Abū Bekr told me that Ṣāliḥ b. Kaisān said: 'We began to pull down the mosque of the Prophet in Ṣafar 88 (i.e. January 707). Al-Walīd had sent to inform the lord of the Greeks (*Ṣāḥib al-Rūm*) that he had ordered the demolition of the mosque of the Prophet, and that he should aid him in this work. The latter sent him 100,000 *mithqāls* of gold, and sent also 100 workmen, and sent him 40 loads of mosaic cubes; he gave orders also to search for mosaic cubes in ruined cities and sent them to al-Walīd, who sent them to [his governor in Medīna] 'Omar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz.' "[5]

Further, in regard to the Mosque of Damascus, the geographer al-Maqdisī, already cited for the Syrian tradition, says: "The implements and mosaics for the mosque were sent by the king of the Greeks."[6] The developments of this tradition in the later Arabic works, progressively elaborating the story with imaginative detail, such as al-Walīd's threat to the Emperor to devastate his eastern provinces if he refused the request, need not be taken into consideration. So far as is known at present, no similar statement is found in regard to the construction of the Dome of the Rock at Jerusalem. This

[5] II, 1194. Mūsā b. Abū Bakr is again quoted as intermediate authority for a tradition from Ṣāliḥ b. Kaisān relating the visit of inspection of the caliph al-Walīd to the mosque at Medīna in A.H. 93: II, 1232–3.

[6] *B.G.A.*, III, 158.

omission may itself be significant, as an indication that the two traditions quoted are specific and independent, and do not rest upon what may be called a "general hypothesis."

In Creswell's great survey of Umayyad architecture, Mlle. van Berchem attempts to discredit the tradition cited by al-Ṭabarī.[7] She points out first that it is not included in the earlier historical chronicle of al-Balādhurī, and proceeds to question al-Ṭabarī's complete veracity, adding: "Moreover, Ṭabarī was a Persian and he lived (in Persia or in 'Iraq) at an epoch when legends concerning the first great Khalifs had already blossomed in a very luxuriant fashion." Now this, with all due respect, is a preposterous assertion. To begin with, al-Ṭabarī has no responsibility for the tradition beyond reporting it. Here, as in the whole of his history, he simply quotes what he regards as the most reliable sources, and there has never been any question of his veracity in quoting these sources. Any criticism must therefore be directed to the report itself and *its* sources.

"Muḥammad says." As many other passages make clear, this is Muḥammad b. 'Omar al-Wāqidī, who died in 823 – a truly prodigious figure in Arabic historiography, the first systematic collector of the materials for the early history of Islam. That this report was really transmitted from him is certain from brief allusions to it in other surviving works prior to al-Ṭabarī,[8] even though al-Balādhurī (who also based his chronicles largely on al-Wāqidī) omits it in his summary chronicle; but in this, it should be noted, he devotes only five lines or so to this reconstruction. Now, as Sauvaget points out, al-Ṭabarī, in selecting from the mass of documents at his disposal relating to this event, chose four which were *d'une qualité exceptionelle.* What is remarkable is that all four are taken from materials collected from al-Wāqidī, that all four relate the statements of eye-witnesses on the evidence of *one* intermediate link (a different one in each narrative), and that two of them (of which this particular report is one) are statements of Ṣāliḥ b. Kaisān, who was *the officer actually in charge of the work of demolition and reconstruction of the mosque.* We should need to discover extraordinarily strong arguments to disprove the authenticity of this narrative; it is indeed difficult to see any way of doing so except by demolishing the entire foundations on which early Islamic history rests. Sauvaget himself, as will be seen presently, makes no attempt to deny or disprove the statement, but tries only to change its interpretation.

To return to Mlle. van Berchem. After a long and methodically rather confused analysis of this and other texts, she is finally compelled, in face

[7] K. A. C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, I (Oxford, 1932), 156–7.
[8] J. Sauvaget, *La Mosquée omeyyade de Médine* (Paris, 1947), 10–11.

of the formal statement quoted above from al-Maqdisī – that the Emperor sent implements and mosaics for the work on the mosque of Damascus – to concede that the texts are "not absolutely conclusive" on the subject of Byzantine assistance. And so she falls back on the final argument: that "political conditions under the reigns of 'Abd al-Malik and al-Walīd were scarcely favourable to friendly exchanges between the court of Byzantium and that of Damascus," adding as a final fling: "Would not so patriotic a monarch as al-Walīd have experienced some reluctance in asking a favour from Constantinople?" (pp. 163–4).

These final arguments may be set aside for the moment with the remark that the attitude of mind that they presuppose is too much a modern one to be applied without a good deal of shading to any period of mediaeval history. To sum up, Mlle. van Berchem's arguments on historical grounds are entirely unconvincing. When, on the other hand, she comes to the archaeological evidence from the monuments themselves, it is impossible for the layman to question her conclusions that the mosaic decorations are almost wholly Syrian in workmanship, although she explicitly adds: "without denying the possibility of one or even several master-mosaicists having come from Constantinople."

It is much more surprising, however, to find such a careful historian as was Jean Sauvaget practically accepting the whole of Mlle. van Berchem's conclusions. Indeed, he goes even further, to deny as a "tradition of legendary character" the participation of workmen from Byzantium.[9] To be sure, he cannot wave aside as airily as she does the tradition reported by al-Ṭabarī through al-Wāqidī from Ṣāliḥ b. Kaisān, which he has already described as a tradition "of exceptional quality." This would seem to involve him in a dilemma, but the dilemma is ingeniously resolved by a reinterpretation of the tradition. The fact that the mosaics of Damascus and Jerusalem are "more probably" (*plutôt*) the work of Syrian Christians gives the clue, he says, to the origin of the tradition which represents the Byzantine Emperor as taking a hand in the construction of the Umayyad monuments: "the Arabic word *Rūm* (properly "Romans") having been used indifferently to denote the Byzantines and the Christians of the Melkite [i.e. Orthodox] Greek rite who lived in Muslim territory, there has been a misunderstanding of the meaning to be given to it in historical narratives relating to the construction of these monuments." *Ṣāḥib al-Rūm*, he explains in a footnote, may mean either the Byzantine Emperor or "the head (spiritual or lay) of the Greek Melkites." The misunderstanding in the original tradition relating to the Mosque of Medīna, he adds, "was no doubt perfectly innocent, and it is

[9] *Op. cit.*, 111–2.

permissible to see in it a more or less conscious alteration of the true meaning under the influence of political afterthoughts." These, he explains, were due to the attempt, in pious or anti-Umayyad circles, to cast discredit on the Umayyads by representing al-Walīd's purpose in reconstructing the mosque, "laudable in itself, as a blameworthy initiative, because it led to having the Prophet's own mosque rebuilt by infidel subjects of a monarch who was the enemy of Islam."

This last argument is even more surprising, coming from the pen of such an authority; in fact he produces little evidence to support it beyond quoting certain pietistic traditions against the decoration of mosques *in general.* If there had really been any widespread, or even factitious, resentment of al-Walīd's initiative, one would expect to find it expressed in much more open terms, without having to guess at an anti-Umayyad implication. In the later elaboration, at least, the tone is clearly one rather of exultation that the Emperor was in some sense contrained to do this service on behalf of the rival Faith. And finally, although *Ṣāḥib al-Rūm* may possibly, in certain contexts, mean "the chief of the Orthodox Melkite community," it would be desirable to find other instances of its use in this sense and in such a context. On all grounds, therefore, it is evident that the efforts to discredit or reinterpret the tradition transmitted by al-Wāqidī carry no conviction. The most that might be admitted (but that readily) would be that the figures may be suspected of having grown a little even in the course of *one* transmission.

But the most surprising feature in all this discussion is that the most massive testimony of all has been entirely overlooked. A certain scholar of Medīna, Ibn Zabāla, composed in A.D. 814 a *History of Medīna,* which is known so far to have survived only in extracts cited in later works. What Sauvaget has to say of Ibn Zabāla's *History* is highly relevant here. "This work is for us of capital importance. Its interest lies (1) in the personality of the author, a disciple of the great *Medinian* doctor Mālik b. Anas. . . . Ibn Zabāla was in a position to assemble *on the spot,* in the best conditions for both transmission and criticism, the local tradition relating to the ancient history of the Mosque; (2) in his date. This gives us the assurance that the evidence of contemporaries could have been noted down without an excessive number of intermediaries, the composition of the work being *just one century later* than the execution of the operations of al-Walīd. To the extent that it is known to us, Ibn Zabāla's work remains the best authority on which to support an attempt to reconstitute the Umayyad mosque." [10]

In the extracts preserved from Ibn Zabāla's *History* in the historical work

[10] *Op. cit.,* 26.

of al-Samhūdī (d. 1506) – itself a work of extraordinary erudition [11] – there is the following statement, supported not by a single tradition, but by an imposing list of excellent authorities:

> "They report: [12] Al-Walīd b. 'Abd al-Malik wrote to the King [*N.B.*] of the Greeks: 'We purpose to restore the greatest mosque of our Prophet; aid us therefore to do so by workers and mosaic cubes.' And he sent him loads of mosaic cubes and some twenty-odd workmen – but some say ten workmen, adding 'I have sent to you ten who are equal to a hundred' – and (sent also) 80,000 dinars as a subvention for them." [13]

In view of this statement, supplementing the statements already cited, there seems to remain no possible doubt that the Greek Emperor did in fact supply some workmen in mosaics, along with mosaic cubes, for both the mosques of Medīna and Damascus, and sent also money or gold for the work on the mosque of Medīna at least.[14]

Nevertheless, this participation of the Emperor does raise certain questions, both in itself and in its implications. How did it come about that the Umayyads, officially engaged in almost continuous warfare with the Greeks (indeed the very next item in al-Ṭabarī's chronicle after the tradition discussed above is the report of a series of successes by Arab armies in Anatolia), were yet able to make this request, on at least two occasions, and that it was granted on each occasion? How, to begin with, were the requests transmitted? It is precisely here that the deficiencies of the chronicles – with their laconic "he wrote" – become most apparent. The chronicles were composed in 'Irāq, largely on the basis of 'Irāqī materials, more than a century later. Apart from the official public actions of the Caliphs, they supply absolutely no information about Syria in the Umayyad period. For the century during which Damascus was the capital of an empire extending from Central Asia to Spain, we remain almost ignorant of its own history, ex-

[11] See Sauvaget's remarks, *ibid.*, 27–8.

[12] Al-Samhudi, *Wafā' al-Wafā*, I (Cairo, 1336H) 367 (the chain of authorities, which cites not less than seven sources, is on p. 364 *infra*). I am indebted for this reference, and for that from Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam cited below, to Dr. S. A. El-'Alī.

[13] This quotation is followed by several other reports collected by al-Samhūdī from other sources. These give differing figures for the number of workmen, and specifically mention Syrians and Copts among them. One report adds that the Emperor sent also chains for the mosque lamps.

[14] Mr. John Parker has drawn my attention to the story of Theophanes (A.M. 6183, ed. de Boor, p. 365) which relates that 'Abd al-Malik, wishing to build "the temple at Mecca" was on the point of taking columns from a church at Jerusalem, but was dissuaded by local Christians who told him that they could persuade Justinian II to supply other columns, "which was done." There appears to be no confirmation of this story in the known Arabic sources.

cept for such scraps and crumbs as can be gathered from archaeology and by fragmentary materials from other sources.

As a result of this absence of data relative to the internal conditions in Syria, it is very commonly supposed that its conquest by the Arabs brought about the complete suspension of its former commercial relations with the Greek territories. Certainly, they were severely curtailed; but it would be an anachronistic proceeding to read back into mediaeval life the common phenomena of modern political relations. A state of official war did not necessarily involve the suspension of all commercial or courtesy relations. We have the indisputable evidence of the flourishing commercial intercourse between the Muslim cities of Syria and the Crusaders' ports of Tyre and Acre during the Crusades,[15] which was almost completely unaffected by the military operations between the opposing princes and their armies.

By lucky chance, however, we are not reduced entirely to conjecture in regard to the continuance of a certain amount of commercial intercourse between Byzantium and Syria (and/or Egypt) in the Umayyad period. Several fragmentary references survive in the Arabic sources:

1. A certain Abū 'Ubaid al-Qāsim b. Sallām compiled, about 840, an extensive and valuable corpus of traditions relating to the fiscal institutions of the Muslim State, which, unlike the better-known 'Irāqī works on the subject, preserves a number of Syrian traditions. On the subject of the tolls to be exacted from merchants at the frontier, he cites a regulation ascribed to 'Omar I (634–644) — whether accurately may be doubted, inasmuch as it was a commonplace of Muslim tradition to represent rules established after the time of Muḥammad as ordinances of 'Omar — which lays down the rates as 2½ per cent on the merchandise of Muslim traders, 5 per cent on that of non-Muslims resident in Muslim territory (i.e. *Dhimmīs*), and 10 per cent on the merchandise of foreign traders. As justification for the last rate it is added: "because they were taking the same percentage from the Muslim merchants when these entered their territory." A few lines later, the identity of these foreign traders is defined unambiguously: "the *Rūm* — they used to come to Syria." [16]

2. In a rescript of 'Omar II (717–720), the Caliph prohibits the placing of obstacles in the way of those who trade by sea. This is puzzling, since there seems to be no record of obstacles placed by Arab governors to trading by sea in the first Islamic century, and in fact Baṣra was already developing by that time a flourishing overseas trade through the Persian Gulf. The most

[15] Ibn Jubair (Wright-de Goeje), 298; trans. R. J. C. Broadhurst (London, 1952), 313.

[16] Abū 'Ubaid ibn Sallām, *Kitāb al-Amwāl* (Cairo, n.d.), nos. 1651 and 1655.

probable explanation, although admittedly inferential, is that this too must refer to Syria, and to trade between the Syrian ports and the Byzantine territories. From the very little and mostly indirect evidence we have about such places as Antioch and Latakia, they seem to have continued to flourish after the Arab conquest, and they can hardly have done so except by commerce.[17]

3. In the Arabic traditions relating to the striking of gold dīnārs by ʿAbd al-Malik, it is stated that "Papyrus used to be exported to the land of the *Rūm* from the land of the Arabs, and dīnārs to be received from their side." [18]

4. The fourth passage is still more decisive, and throws wide open a window into the subject of this discussion. It is found in a local history of Egypt, by the ninth-century Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam (the same writer who transcribed, in another work, the rescript of ʿOmar II quoted above). In dealing with the settlements of the Arabs in Fusṭāṭ (Old Cairo), he relates at some length a dispute in regard to the possession of an establishment called "the Pepper House" (*Dār al-Fulful*).[19] This dispute is, of course, his main interest, but in a note he adds: "Why it was called the Pepper House was because, when Usāma b. Zaid al-Tanūkhī was director of taxes in Egypt, he purchased from Mūsā b. Wardān pepper to the value of 20,000 dīnārs, on instructions from [the Caliph] al-Walīd, who purposed to send that as a gift to the *Ṣāḥib al-Rūm*, and he stored that pepper in this house."

There can be no doubt that the *Ṣāḥib al-Rūm* here has its normal significance of the Emperor of Byzantium. And this little note seems to supply a clue to the whole transaction. There is no question at all of al-Walīd either threatening the Emperor with dire destruction, or sacrificing his patriotic feelings (whatever that may mean) to beg a favour. If such a present was made once, there is no reason to regard it as an isolated instance; it just happens that this one record has survived, and it is enough to show that, even while the two empires were at war, the continuance of commercial relations permitted the exchange of courtesies between the two courts.

To return finally to the public sphere, it has sometimes been remarked

[17] See H. A. R. Gibb, "The Fiscal Rescript of ʿUmar II" in *Arabica*, II, fasc. 1 (Leiden, 1955), 6, 11.

[18] Ibn Qutaiba, *ʿUyūn al-Akhbār*, I (Cairo, 1925), 198. Cf. J. Walker, *Catalogue of the Muhammadan Coins in the British Museum. Arab-Byzantine and Post-Reform Umaiyad Coins* (London, 1956), liv: "An exchange of letters between the Emperor and Caliph led to a breach of diplomatic and trade relations."

[19] Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ. Miṣr*, ed. C. C. Torrey (New Haven, 1922), 98–99.

that the government of the Umayyad Caliphs was in several respects that of a "succession-state" to the East Roman Empire, notwithstanding the ideological oppositions involved in the sphere of religion. At the Byzantine court, one may suspect, a formal pretence was maintained that the Caliphs were just another group of barbarian invaders who had seized some of the provinces of the Empire, and were disregarding their proper status as vassal princes. Hence the indignation of Justinian II when ʿAbd al-Malik infringed the imperial privilege of striking gold coinage. The Umayyad Caliphate, however, in its attitude to the Empire, was much more than a provincial succession-state. The two facets of its policy, the military assault and the administrative adaptation, point clearly to the real ambition of the first-century Caliphs, which was nothing less than to establish their own imperial dynasty at Constantinople. Seen in this light, their administrative imitations and adaptations take on a different character; they are not merely the tribute paid by raw and parvenu princes to the achievements of their predecessors, but an almost deliberate effort to learn the ropes and fit themselves to assume the imperial destiny.

But after the catastrophe (or victory) of 718, there follows a sudden and complete reversal. The whole policy of the Umayyad Caliphs swings decisively away from the Byzantine tradition and becomes oriented in the true sense, i.e. towards the East. This change, which has not as yet been fully appreciated by students of Arab history, is clearly marked in the reign of the caliph Hishām (725–743), a brother of the caliphs al-Walīd and Sulaimān who mounted the last, and fatal, assault on Constantinople, but the first signs can be seen immediately after its failure, in the reforming Islamizing policies of their cousin, the pious caliph ʿOmar II.

It is tempting to bring this reversal into relation with the crushing disappointment of the hopes and dreams of the Umayyad Caliphs, and to see in it a kind of Freudian compensation – a deliberate rejection of the Byzantine tradition, motivated by resentment, and the search for some more compliant and attractive substitute. But it was almost certainly much more than that. After a century of Arab empire in Western Asia, the over-all structure of the empire was beginning to solidify, and the relative weight of its constituent provinces to tell. In the balance of forces, Syria still held a military preponderance, but one which became increasingly precarious, as first ʿIrāq and then one province after another had to be held to obedience by Syrian garrisons. Ideologically, however (as we should say now), the center of Muslim culture and thought was already located in ʿIrāq, and the imperial background and determinants of the Arabs of ʿIrāq were not Byzantine, but Persian and hostile to Byzantium. It was the caliph Hishām who first grasped

the implications of the growing weight of 'Irāq and the East, and who deliberately broke away from the ambitions of his predecessors to organize the Arab empire as the future heir of Byzantium. So far as we can reconstruct, on direct or indirect evidence, the fiscal and administrative policies of Hishām, they appear consistently directed to establishing the Arab empire as the heir of the Oriental tradition and the successor of the Persian Sasanid empire. It was he, too, who began the process by which the administrative center was gradually moved eastwards, a process which was continued by the last Umayyad caliph Marwān II, and finally consolidated by the foundation of Baghdād under the succeeding 'Abbāsid Caliphate.